

OPINION

Voting Fraud Is a Real Concern. Just Look Around the World | Opinion

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FRAUD

Thirty-seven states have changed their mail-in voting procedures this year in response to the coronavirus. They have followed the lead of Democrats and the media, who claim that concerns about voter fraud and vote buying are figments of the Republican imagination.

President Trump's comments on Thursday and Friday about voter fraud with mail-in ballots have sent the media into a frenzy. One "news" article after another since then has asserted that President Trump's warning is "baseless" (Associated Press and *The Washington Post*) or "without evidence" (*The New York Times*, *Politico* and *NBC News*).

Liberals and progressives often try to model the U.S. on Western European countries, but you never hear them arguing that we should adopt their voting rules. There is a reason for that. Banning mail-in voting or requiring people to use photo IDs to obtain a mail-in ballot is quite common in developed countries, especially in Europe.

To study this, the Crime Prevention Research Center, of which I am the president, created a database on voting rules around the world.

Here is what we found. Besides the United States, there are 36 member states in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Forty-seven percent ban mail-in voting unless the citizen is living abroad, and 30 percent require a photo ID to obtain a mail-in ballot. Fourteen percent of the countries ban mail-in voting even for those living abroad.

In addition, some countries that allow voting by mail for some citizens living in the country don't allow it for everyone. For example, Japan and Poland have limited mail-in voting for those who have special certificates verifying that they are disabled. France has made an exception this year to its ban on mail-in ballots to those who are sick or at particular risk during the coronavirus pandemic. Poland will allow mail-in ballots for everyone for this year only.

Brazil and Russia satisfy the economic standards of the OECD, but are excluded for various political reasons. Both countries completely ban mail-in voting and require photo IDs for in-person voting.

Among the 27 countries in the European Union, 63 percent ban mail-in voting unless living abroad and another 22 percent require a photo ID to obtain a mail-in ballot. Twenty-two percent ban the practice even for those who live abroad.

There are 16 countries in the rest of Europe, and they are even more restrictive. Every single one bans mail-in voting for those living in the country or require a photo ID to obtain a mail-in ballot. Sixty-three percent don't allow mail-in ballots even for citizens living outside of the country.

Are all of these countries, socialist and non-socialist alike, Western and Eastern European, developed and undeveloped, acting "without evidence?" It is not as though people in these countries haven't heard the same arguments about the importance of the ease of voting—or about how photo ID requirements will, as one professor in the U.K. explained, supposedly "lead to people not being able to vote."

These countries have learned the hard way what happens when mail-in ballots aren't secured. They have also discovered how hard it is to detect vote buying when both those buying and selling the votes have an incentive to hide the exchange.

France banned mail-in voting in 1975 because of massive fraud in Corsica, where postal ballots were stolen or bought and voters cast multiple votes. Mail-in ballots were used to cast the votes of dead people.

The U.K., which allows postal voting, has had some notable mail-in ballot fraud cases. Prior to recent photo ID requirements, six Labour Party councilors in Birmingham won office after what the judge described as a "massive, systematic and organized" postal voting fraud campaign. The fraud was apparently carried out with the full knowledge and cooperation of the local Labour Party. There was "widespread theft" of postal votes (possibly around 40,000 ballots) in areas with large Muslim populations, because Labour members were worried that the Iraq War would spur these voters to oppose the incumbent government.

In 1991, Mexico's election mandated voter photo IDs and banned absentee ballots. The then-governing Institutional Revolutionary Party had long used fraud and intimidation with mail-in ballots in order to win elections. Only in 2006 were absentee ballots again allowed, and then only for those living abroad who requested them at least six months in advance.

If concern about voter fraud with mail-in ballots is delusional, it is a delusion that is shared by most of the world. Even the countries that allow mail-in ballots have protections, such as government-issued photo IDs. But Americans are constantly assured even this step is completely unnecessary. Without basic precautions, our elections are on course to become the laughingstock of the developed world.

John R. Lott, Jr. is the president of the Crime Prevention Research Center and the author of the new book, Gun Control Myths.

The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.